

EVOLUTION OF THE BARD, REVISED

"Wormwood: one of the wittiest and most intelligent herbs known to man. Used extensively as a diuretic for poet's block. The leaves laid among poems will repel cliches."

-- The Farmer's Guide To Poetry

"Don't be afraid of wit and intelligence."

-- From "tips on getting published in
The Wormwood Review" by Editor Marvin
Malone in Writer's Market

It pestered Steve
Like a Top 40 tune:

"Don't be afraid of wit and intelligence,"

Says the editor of Wormwood Review.

"I've read the mag!" says Steve.

"Wit and intelligence?

There must be some mistake.

The editor must mean:

Don't be afraid of fits and intemperance!

Or maybe zits and incontinence!"

But that was before Steve

Received his Wormwood Review

Rejection slip, stating:

"Sorry, but we feel you're afraid

Of wit and intelligence."

Minutes after the rejection slip arrived,

Steve's wife filed for divorce:

"I'm sorry, Steve, but I could never

Live with a man who's afraid

Of wit and intelligence."

The word spread fast.

Old girlfriends began to avoid him:

"What? Me skizzle with a guy

Who's afraid of wit and intelligence?

Not on your life, buster!"

Even Steve's fellow poets,

Each, of course, fearless

In the face of wit and intelligence,

Pointed accusing fingers

And wittily called him "coward."

Happily then, Steve discovered the Wormwood Hills
Institute for the Witless and the Unintelligent.

"I used to be nothing," says Steve on TV,
"But now, Wormwood Hills has changed my life.
I'm cured completely -- no more rejections for me!"

"You too can overcome your fear of wit and intelligence.
Impress your friends! Impress your publisher!
Skizzle to your heart's desire!
Call now! Toll free, 1-800-452-4836,
Wisecracking operators are standing by!"

FORT ROCK

This is not the Oregon
They hear about somewhere else.
It is open, sagebrush and desert,
The domain of cowboy philosopher Reub Long
Who claimed he was eighteen years old
Before he saw his first rain:
"And then," he said, "the drops were so big
They knocked me out cold!
Why, they had to throw six buckets of sand
In my face to bring me around!"

It is Reub who donated Fort Rock
For an Oregon state park,
And we drive for miles
Across the flatness to reach it,
Suddenly startled by the immensity
Of this volcanic crater remnant,
Sheer basaltic cliffs rising three hundred feet
Complete with wave-cut terraces
Carved by an extinct lake.
Pioneers, they say, used
The three-sided fortress
For protection against the Indians;
And found nearby in a cave,
Perfectly-preserved sagebrush sandals
Now dated at over 9000 years.
It is all a fitting memorial
To this man Reub, who spent his life
Preserving the treasures of this desert.

At the parking lot
Frantic teenagers race motorcycles,
While their placid families,
Lolling beside Airstream trailers
Drawl over corn on the cob.
We follow an arguing married couple
Up the trail to the viewpoint
And the Reub Long Memorial: